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THE
Romance of a Great Indian Social Servant

OR

The Life and Career of Mr. Sasipada Banerji

BY

B. N. MOTIWALA, B.A., LL. B., J.P.

SECOND EDITION

WITH A FOREWORD BY THE
HON. MR. P. C. LYON, C. S. I.

PUBLISHED BY

Satindra Nath Ray Chaudhuri, M.A., B.L.

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The Romance of a Great Indian Social
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Career of Mr. Sasipada Banerji,

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auspices of the S. S. League Bombay on Monday, the
6th December 1915, under the presidency of
Mr. K. Natarajan, B. A., Editor, "In-
dian Social Reformer."*

BY

B. N. MOTIWALA, B.A., LL.B., J.P.

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Foreword

(BY THE HON. MR. P. C. LYON C.S.I., I.C.S.)

Perhaps the optimist has no surer ground for his outlook on life than the larger conception of the rights of humanity in general and of the duty of the individual towards his neighbour which is making its way slowly but surely among all classes in all civilised nations. Its growth is measured by the shock that has been felt throughout the civilised world at the negation of this principle involved in the methods by which the Central Powers in Europe are conducting the present war. But the theory that the rights of humanity are limited by racial boundaries, upon which their disastrous error is based, will, we may confidently assert, receive its death-blow as one result of this terrible conflict. This realisation of a great truth is the inevitable outcome of the spread of education and the development of civilisation, which have burst the bonds of rules and restrictions originally laid down in a stage of social evolution which has long since passed away. And it is especially noticeable in India, where the admixture of races and religions brings us at every turn into close contact with special restrictions of the kind to which I refer. It is indeed a matter for congratulation that we should find that in times of trouble and calamity the larger law is beginning to assert itself, and that when famine or flood devastates the homes of the poor the Marwaris from Jodhpur and Bikanir vie with the Brahmins and Kayesthas of Bengal in taking succour

to their Muhammadan brethren. And we see the same spirit prevailing in the societies organised for the assistance of the working classes in big towns and in similar efforts made to batter down those walls of custom which only obstruct the light of a new day.


But while we now openly and almost universally acknowledge the altruism and practical wisdom which guide these efforts, and wonder that they can ever have been misunderstood, we must not forget the men who first initiated them in the dark days when obloquy and persecution were the reward of such reformers. And we must also remember that the battle is not yet over and give due honour to those who are holding up the light for the illumination of the dark corners where prejudice still lurks. There are yet many customs and social laws, sanctified by immemorial usage, which traverse the dictates of humanity and for the maintenance of which no reasonable contention can be advanced.

The following pages, written by one who is not himself of Bengal but who can appreciate the labours of a fellow worker in the great cause, from whatever country he may come, tell us of the life and labours of a man who has spent all his days in work as a pioneer in this field, one who has relieved the poor, irrespective of caste or station, has mitigated the sad lot of the Indian widow, and has preached the gospel of work and of humanity from the time when there were none to listen and many to persecute, to the time when all will listen and many obey. Sevabrata Sasipada Banerji has penetrated to the truths that underlie all religions and appeals to men of all faiths and all creeds.

It is in the hope that others may be led by this record of noble work to go and attempt to do likewise, that I invite their attention, not so much to the man—he would be the last to wish that—but to the principles for which he stands and the cause for which he pleads. There never can be too many workers in that cause or preachers of those principles, and even those who cannot give their time and labour for the direct furtherance of the work can each in his own way forward it by moral and material encouragement.

April 1916.

P. C. LYON.



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Publisher's Preface.

It was kind of my respected friend Mr. Motiwala to give me permission to reprint his valuable address on the Life and career of sevabrata Srijut Sasipada Banerje. The author is a prominent member of the Gujratee community of Bombay with liberal views, and is one of the most enthusiastic organisers of the Bombay Social Service League. He is not personally known to Sevabrata Mahasay, or to me. But he must be a very careful reader of social service literature and have taken the greatest pain to understand him from literature on his life and work. Had a complete life of Mr Banerjee been printed his task might have been easier, but he had to form his idea of Sasipada from a few tracts on some of his works only. Difficult as it is to understand a man truly from books alone, still more so is it to write anything about him from such scanty materials. Pandit Sitanath Tattwabhusan writes in his Indubala:—"A close study of the system of domestic training of which that character was a necessary result, has taught me much—has furnished me with the most valuable principles and living examples for my guidance as the father of a family." It is also my personal knowledge, that one will not be able to understand him perfectly, to appreciate his work truly unless he comes in closer contact with him and watches the ways of his life. It has been given to Mr. Motiwala to know him even from a distance, and to sift the incomplete materials with the greatest care. So it must be said to his credit that he has understood Sasipada, the man, without having any

personal acquaintance ; and having truly known him has turned out to be his admirer. I, for one, may note here that had he seen the man once, and come in his contact his convictions as to his life and character would have been stronger, and his admiration therefor still the greater.

As I have said elsewhere every one is engaged in social service. The man who is spending lacs of rupees for the suffering humanity cannot boastfully say that he is the only man serving the society, nay, the man who by his hard toils earns money only to maintain his family is also serving the society, for he is doing work of the society. removing some want which in case of his inability would have devolved on it. The difference is one of degree, not of kind, and Sasipada feels that he is but one in this line of social servants, and that there is no credit due to him for what he has done. He feels we are working in the hand of God, for the good of our country and society, in our respective lines ; and we are like pawns on a chess board, being moved by His finger ; and just as a pawn may throw off a knight or a rook at a proper move so also we are doing work great or small at the motion of His finger. All our work is acceptable to him since we are running at His bidding.

Of all social service the moulding of one's own life and family is the greatest. For other service is only the reflection of the work that a man is doing within himself and his family. The man who has failed here, failed in building his character, failed in training his family, must fail also if he try to serve the society. The individual is the unit of society and if that unit is strongly built and properly trained the society is strengthened and supported. Hence there can be no

greater way of serving the society than by serving ones'self, by forming one's own character and training his family. And it is exactly in this respect that Sasipada has achieved very great success and is an example to the country. As to what he has done for properly bringing up his sons and daughters a volume will be insufficient; my paper on the family Samadhi Mandir of Mr. Banerji which is in the press gives some idea thereof. As to his own life, independence and faith in God are the root of all his pioneer work. He has been his own doctor, his family doctor, a builder, a carpenter, a teacher but always a learner. He derived the source of nearly all his work for society in his own family life, and introduced new lines of work first in his family, then in the society at large.

Mr. Motiwala has given a short sketch of Mr. Banerjee's work in the cause of female education in Bengal. It is interesting to note that lately the Government of India has issued a circular letter to all provincial Governments asking them to report on the present state of female education in India and asking for recommendations from them as to how female education may be more efficiently spread in the country so that it may train our girls to be competent mothers and efficient heads of families, and also our widows to be of greater service to society. The India Government letter does not refer to the history and state of female education prior to 1882, when the education commission was appointed. But it is proper to take a comprehensive survey of the history of female education in our country from the Hindu Period to the present age. The historic method combined with present experience may help greatly in determining as to how female education may be made really serviceable to the country. If

• a competent man take the pains necessary to compile such a history and if the Provincial Governments consider the matter in that light also, the problem may be solved with less difficulty. In this connection it is well to bear in mind that the considerations and suggestions which the India Government has embodied in its recent letter presented them to Mr. Banérjee more than half a century ago, and the course of education and the method of imparting it to our girls, wives and widows which he adopted, were result of serious and continued thought on his part, and that as a consequence his attempts in this direction were attended with eminent success and also attracted the notice of the Government. Mr. Motiwala has done some service in noting in his pamphlet some of Mr. Banerjee's activities with regard to female education of that period which may be of some help to future workers in the field.

It is a common saying that a man is not appreciated in his own country and in his own age. Sasipada also had to pass through various trials and difficulties, ever being misunderstood by those who ought to be grateful to him ; hence instead of support he met with persecutions, and instead of being appreciated he was object of abuse and obloquy. But it may be said to the credit of his countrymen that of late his services have begun to be appreciated in Bengal, and if the wind blow in the present direction, it may be hoped that his life and work will soon meet with greater appreciations throughout India. Of this Mr. Motiwala's paper is the forerunner ; and great is our gratitude to him for this reason

SATINDRA NATH ROY CHAUDHURI.

A modern Saint of India.



Yours truly
Taripada Banerjee.



Mr. SASIPADA BANERJI

A GREAT INDIAN SOCIAL SERVANT.



A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND CAREER.

“No greater power exists on earth for the elevation of society than the man or woman who lives in the pursuit of all truth, goodness and beauty, who as fast as the idea is grasped weaves it into the tissues of life; who by deeds as well as earnest, sincere words, sheds ever a brighter and softer light upon every one around. Great, beautiful and a joy to all souls are such while they live, and however humble their lot in society, they will leave, when they die, a fragrance behind them which will gladden the generations to come.”

REV. JAMES CRANBROOK.

“The greatest greatness, and the only true greatness, in the world is unselfish love and service and self-devotion to one's fellowmen.”

R. W. TRINE.

“The power and supremacy of England to-day proceeds from her free homes and free social institutions—the observance of the law of righteousness as between man and man and class and class; Her political institutions are but the fruits of the life throbbing at the roots of the national life. If

the fruits attract us, let our serious attention be directed to the hidden life that gives them forth. This need not, indeed, lead us to the wholesale adoption of English manners or even English modes of thinking. It should make us think more deeply than we are doing of the principles lying at the root of our own domestic and social life, consider which of them are healthy and which unhealthy, and set about mending our own affairs. It should lead us to repent of iniquities we have been practising and perpetuating concerning our own wives, daughters, sisters, and men who are really our own, but whom we have long treated as aliens. It should lead us to repent and reform—the necessary conditions of entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven, whether religious, social or political.”

SITANATH TATTVABHUSHAN.

INTRODUCTION.

I have selected for the subject of this paper, and that for several reasons, the Life and Career of Mr. Sasipada Banerji. Mr. Banerji is perhaps not so well-known here as in Bengal, where he is looked upon as an eminent philanthropist. As such he has rendered innumerable services to Bengal and indirectly to the country at large. He is now seventy-six years old and has been quietly enjoying his well earned rest. His failing health and advanced age, have compelled him to sever his long and intimate connection with many of his former activities. Though this great Social Servant of Bengal is still amidst us, still, to all intents and purposes, his public career may be said to have come to a close. In one of his Notes, Banerji writes of himself thus :—“My life has been a great

romance, more so than what any human imagination can create. It is the play of His fingers on the harp of time " In India, I for one, have not come across any other Indian who has rendered so much useful service to his country and in so many directions, and that too, amidst trying circumstances. I consider the career of Banerji to be so exemplary, as to think that all young Indians aspiring to do real, substantial social work cannot do better than emulate the life and career of this worthy son of India. They will find in that life, all the traits that go to make an ideal true social servant.

LIFE AND CAREER.

The multifarious activities of Banerji's life can be best grouped under two main heads :—Social Reform and Religious Reform. But before we come to that, it is better to know a few details of his life.

Banerji was born in the year 1840 of a Kulin Bahmin family at Barahnagar (the suburb of Calcutta). He was the third son of his father Rajkumar Banerji, a public spirited man of the place, one of the founders of the first English School there. Rajkumar Master, by that name he was known in his days, died when Sasipada was only five years old. He was brought up by his mother, a woman of strong common-sense, though without the advantages of what we understand as education in these days. She died of cholera in the year 1863. Banerji went through the usual Pathsala and High School courses, but on account of the straitened circumstances of the family, had to leave his school before passing the Matriculation Examination. He was married at the age of twenty—a late

age for those times and for one belonging to his high caste. On the death of his first wife, he married an educated widow. By his first wife, he had five sons. His only surviving son is a Master of Arts of the Calcutta University, and is a member of the Indian Civil Service. For years, Banerji served as a teacher in the Salkia School. Till the year 1870 he was a man of limited means struggling with difficulties. Then he obtained a Government post and had a large income. For the manifold good deeds performed by Banerji, the Pandits of Bhatpara decorated him with the title of Sevabrata. In 1866 the Government appointed him an Honorary Magistrate and an Honorary Secretary of the Municipal Board. On the eve of his departure for England in 1871, the inhabitants of Barahnagar and the adjoining villages presented him with an Address in which they recounted all the self-sacrificing labours performed by Banerji for their good. On the 16th August 1871 Degrees of the Order of Good Templars were conferred on him at Birmingham for the work he had done so far in the cause of the Temperance movement in India. Although honoured in this way, Banerji never felt elated, because he has not cared for worldly honours as such. They are to him an additional incentive to continuous good work. Throughout his life he has found supreme satisfaction only in the honest performance of life's sacred duties. In 1877, on the occasion of the Royal Proclamation (1st January 1877) of the assumption by Her Majesty Queen Victoria, of the title of Empress of India, the Government presented Banerji a Certificate of Honour " in recognition of his services rendered to the Public in connection with various benevolent projects."

SOCIAL REFORM.

I will treat this subject under four sub-headings, *viz:*—

1. Elevation of the Working Classes.
2. Emancipation of Hindu Woman.
3. Temperance Work.
4. Miscellaneous Social Service.

I.—ELEVATION OF THE WORKING CLASSES.

Barahnagar, the birth-place of Banerji, is a native manufacturing town and a seat of European Factories. It has several Mills and Work-Shops; and as such, forms the residence of a very large number of working classes. Naturally therefore Banerji found out his sphere of philanthropic work first among these people. On the 1st of November 1866, he established there a Night School for the benefit of these people, and after a time succeeded in starting its branches at some of the neighbouring places. He also started a Middle Vernacular School for them near Serampur. In 1870 the old Temperance Society was closed and it was converted into a "Workingmen's Club"—the first of its kind in India. Total abstinence was laid down as an absolute condition for its membership. A small Library was attached to this Club. The members were given the benefit of Addresses of a moral and practical nature, by sympathetic visitors of the Club. Banerji himself gave useful discourses in this Club. It held its meetings at the houses of its members; and thus the members' wives, mothers and sisters were made to take interest in them. Many of the members joined the Sadharan Dharma Sava, (Universal Religious Association) started by

Banerji in 1873. For the benefit of the female members of the working classes, Banerji convened meetings at his own house, where he gave Lantern Lectures and entertained the workers in different ways. He took the working classes for several Excursions, one of which was organized so splendidly that even the attention of Her Majesty, the late Queen Victoria was drawn to the same. This Club permitted its members to put a stop to strikes as far as possible. The members were exhorted to work and look to the interests of their masters ; and at the same time, to present their grievances to their employers in a proper way. The Club was entertained by means of Lantern-Lectures, Exhibitions of Pictures, and Musical and Singing Parties. The members were taught the value of thrift and self-help. Consequently several of them were able out of their savings to carry on cloth business on a small scale, and several others wove cloth on Sundays and other holidays. In 1889 at the 23rd Annual Distribution of Prizes to the Schools in connection with this Club, the President of the Meeting, Mr. G. B. Croll, of the Barahnagar Jute Mills bore open testimony to Banerji's work by saying that the men and the boys who received tuition in Banerji's Schools, were a far better lot than others who did not do so. Banerji even started an " Anna Savings Bank " for receiving the deposits of his poor friends, at a time when there was no Post Office Savings-Bank. Later on, he persuaded the Government to open a Savings Bank in Barahnagar, just as they had done in district head-quarters and their sub-divisions. In 1874 he started a monthly Paper of a purely educational type. This illustrated Bengali Paper of 8 pages was called Bharat Śramajibi (Indian Workman). It was published with the object of improving the moral and intellectual condition of the

working classes. 15,000 copies of the Paper were printed, a very large number for those days and each was sold for one pice. Banerji also helped the cause of these classes in his weekly Paper called the Barahnagar Samachar. His work was not confined only to Hindu working classes. In 1872 he established a School for Mahomedan boys of the working classes. But besides this work for the Barahnagar people, Banerji did something for the people of Calcutta too. He opened two Night Schools there one at the City College and the other at the Keshub Academy. He also established two Day-Pathsalas for the Children of the working classes. In all these Schools, he had arranged that the pupils should be instructed in their subjects quickly and intelligently. This step he thought, was quite essential, for the class of people, for whose benefit the Schools were started, was not in a position to spare as much time as ordinary people could do, for the purposes of education. In 1866 Banerji started a Society called The Social Improvement Society, and reared it with all his usual indefatigable energy. It did useful work in literary and educational lines. It also helped the people in general matters. In this Society useful lectures were delivered. It assisted the local Vernacular School and girls' Schools. It co-operated with the Magistrate of the Twenty Four Parganas, and the Municipal Committee. It did all this useful work in spite of its very limited annual income. Banerji was the soul of this Society. Owing to his advanced views in several social and religious matters, the progress of the Society was much retarded. This was so only during the time that Banerji was not its Secretary. The enemies of Banerji ultimately saw their mistake and henceforward treated Banerji fairly. During Banerji's visit to England, he

read at Leeds, before the Education Section of the Social Science Association, a paper strongly advocating the introduction of a Factory Act in India. To value his services for the working classes truly, it would suffice, if I mention that the members of the Workingmen's Club openly testified in the Public Address they presented to Banerji, on the eve of his departure for England, to the valuable influence exercised on them by their Club and by the personal work of its founder whom they styled in the Address as "our father." In the city of Bristol, on the 31st of October 1871, The Lewin's Mead Domestic Mission presented to Banerji, a handsomely bound Bible and gave him a Welcome Address in which they appreciated his most valuable services for the Indian working classes. In this Address, they styled Banerji as the first Indian to recognize and work in a practical spirit for the realization of the brotherhood of man, by devoting his time and talents to the raising up of the despised and the down-trodden masses of India.

Banerji's services for the working classes of his native town of Barahnagar and the villages round about, are really unique. The secret of his success in this kind of work lay in the fact that he could impress them by his personal purity and selflessness and he carried on his work among them like a brother working among brothers. In early days, Banerji attended singing parties of lowcaste Hindus held in and around Barahnagar. He joined picnics organized for working-classes, some of whom were men of the lowest class. He visited poor people at their sick-bed ; nursed his mehtar at his home ; freely gave medicine to those who could not afford to buy them. It was this kind of personal work that touched the hearts of the poor people, for whom he lived and laboured

so long. In the School that he had started, he gave discourses and taught the pupils himself. Once he made strenuous efforts to bring to justice, a Police-Sub-Inspector who had committed a brutal outrage on a poor working woman, but who, in order to protect himself, had brought a false charge of rioting against a number of working men. During days of ill health, while sitting in a boat, owned by the Chitagong Manjis, he would call them near him and would read to them books, sing to them hymns, and talk to them on varied topics. He would give them refreshments and mix with them freely. That was the secret of his hold on their minds. Once in a certain village, he heard a new-born baby left in a hut by its parents, crying. Evidently the parents had gone out for work. Banerji lifted up the baby, went about in search of its parents, and only felt easy when he had handed it over to them and saw it quietly nestled in its mother's arms,

Our appreciation of Banerji's work is enhanced, when we remember that he started to do this kind of social service, at a time when he himself struggled for bread. Moreover he was a high-caste Brahmin, between whom and the working classes a great gulf had existed. Banerji was a total abstainer himself. His way of life, being thoroughly righteous and religious, he was able to exert his influence upon them all the better. We have also to note that his work for the elevation of the depressed classes, was undertaken long before any such idea had dawned upon the minds of the people in the country and when the stronghold of orthodoxy was quite powerful to withstand all the attacks levelled against it.

When the Depressed Classes Mission was started in and around Bombay, Banerji helped it with his kind donation of Rs. 200, thus testifying his keen appreciation of this noble

type of service to the downtrodden classes of a province different from his own. For his Baranagar work Benerji has left some money in the hands of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj as a permanent fund for the propagation of Practical Religion and morality among the working people.

2.—EMANCIPATION OF HINDU WOMEN.

Having received the benefit of English education, Banerji's views on many questions of religion and society underwent a great transformation, and he became a very earnest and staunch reformer. In 1865 he gave up idolatry and discarded the sacred thread. In social matters, seeing clearly that it was the caste system that prevented the national unity of India, he gave up the same; and, as we have seen before, he commenced to mix with all classes of people very freely, thoroughly believing that unless that was done it was impossible to elevate the depressed and backward classes of the Indian people. For this open heresy, all Barahnagar rose up in arms against him and his wife; "meetings were held to take steps for putting them in serious difficulties; the barber for instance, was forbidden to shave Banerji; the washerman was threatened with punishment if he washed their clothes; drinking water from the river was not to be supplied to them and even the mehtar was enjoined not to cleanse their privy." He also came to perceive that the very tardy progress of the Indian people in all matters was due to the great ignorance prevailing among the female population of his country. That ignorance, he clearly perceived, placed insuperable obstacles in the path of national advance. It was in this enlightened

condition of his mind that Banerji married a young Brahmin girl of his own choice from a strictly orthodox family in the year 1860. Banerji being a Kulin Brahmin could have got, in this marriage transaction, a large dowry, but he declined to entertain such sordid considerations in so solemn a transaction. At this time, he was seriously thinking as to how he should justify his existence by proving himself of service to his country. His zeal as a reformer had already made his position in his ancestral home quite a solitary one; and after his marriage, it became more galling. One can vividly realize this, when one comes to know that, in the ancestral house in which Banerji was living, there lived too, all members of his family, "consisting of a large number of inmates, seven generations both by male and female lines." Banerji had married in order to find in his wife a sincere and active sympathizer, inspirer and co-worker. But to bring about this magic change in an uneducated girl brought up in a strictly orthodox family and that too, in his home, became to him a matter of extreme difficulty. The wife had to pass her life in the family house where many members were living; and she had no desire whatever to learn. On the other hand, Banerji being an educated young man wanted his wife to share with him the beneficial fruits of education. In this crisis Banerji was obliged to wade through a regular maze of difficulties before he could realize his much cherished object. At the time when Banerji married, female education was practically speaking, nil. Some of the female disciples of Chaitanya sect were well versed in religious lore; but as that sect loosened the bonds of caste and admitted in its fold, people of low caste, it lost its former influence on the higher castes of Bengal. Besides this, the widows of Zemindars had learnt sufficiently to keep

accounts and to manage well their zemindaries in all other respects. But culture as such was confined only to the courtezans. They were well-versed in the accomplishments of music, poetry and drama. The girls' Schools in existence were only attended by the children of the very poorest and lowest classes. The instruction given there was merely religious and the religion taught was Christianity. The attendance of pupils was avowedly purchased. The efforts made by several societies for the progress of female education among the higher caste of Hindus, supplemented by Christian Missionaries was insignificant. The people superstitiously believed that the education of females smelt of widowhood and lack of connubial fidelity. It was in this state of Bengal Society, that Banerji had to carry out the uphill work of educating his own wife. The wife herself strongly opposed all the persuasions of her husband to teach her. Banerji continued to urge upon his wife the necessity of receiving education, with the result that after one year he succeeded in influencing his wife to yield to his desire. But this was not sufficient; it was only the initial triumph. Mrs. Banerji was living in the Zenana apartments of the family house and in accordance with the prevailing custom of an orthodox Bengal family the wives had no opportunity of meeting their husbands during the course of the day. This state of things went on for some time; until at last the thing became quite unbearable. He set at naught the family custom and commenced teaching his wife in his own home during the day. This made his position a queer one; but it made that of his wife a regular trial. She submitted to all the persecution and ridicule that was heaped upon her in consequence. She quietly proceeded with her

studies, for the sake of the love she bore towards her husband. In a few months time, she made considerable progress. This attracted his widowed sister-in-law (brother's wife) and she too became Banerji's pupil. After a short time, she too considerably advanced, and then his cousin and her widowed daughter Kusum Kumari joined. The other members of the family saw the result with their own eyes. The paternal home became gradually a place where both the unmarried girls and the elderly married women along with the widows, commenced to taste the sweet fruits of education. The class of girls was taken up by Mrs. Banerji and the class of elderly ladies was conducted by Banerji himself. Ultimately Banerji started a girls' school at his native town of Barahnagar for the benefit of his family and also for the good of the neighbouring families. This school was started in 1865 and was under the charge of a Pandit and was mainly supported by Banerji himself. It continued its progress for some time; but a crisis came when Banerji openly joined the faith of the Brahmos. The Pandit was instigated to resign. The parents of the girls were persuaded not to send their daughters to Banerji's school. To crown all, even the landlady caused Banerji to vacate the school-premises. These difficulties could not subdue the the pertinacity of purpose in Banerji. He secured another teacher at once; hired a new place on a lease of one year and continued the school for some time, with only one pupil to study in it. He then had recourse to the system of every day giving dolls and other prizes to the pupils who attended his school; he even gave a sort of commission to the maid-servant in charge of the school-premises for every new pupil brought to the school by her influence. With these methods

he succeeded in overcoming all obstacles; and in the year 1866, when a Prize Distribution Gathering was held under the presidentship of Prof. Lobb, the school had on its roll 57 pupils. It was the same school that was honoured by a visit from Sir Richard Temple, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in 1876 when His Honour was presented an address signed by all the leading and respectable inhabitants of Barahnagar. Even the Royal family of England honoured the school in as much as Princess Alice and her sister the Crown Princess of Prussia once sent a number of portraits and other presents to Banerji's school to show their sympathy with the cause of female education among the Hindoos.

The open avowal of the Brahmo faith on the part of Banerji, also came in way of the Zenana Class conducted by him for the benefit of the elderly women of his family. All of them left him. Banerji was then obliged to leave his family house (1866). Henceforth he was free to introduce any changes that he thought necessary to turn his residence into a home of refinement and culture. He felt keenly the damping influence that the Zenana system exercised on the health and character of women. He determined to break it as he believed that the study of nature and life was an indispensable and important aid to mental culture more even than mere book-learning. On the 23rd January 1866 he and his wife were present at the Adi Samaj Prayer Hall on the occasion of the 36th Anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj. In the winter of 1866-7 he and his wife attended a public meeting held in honour of Miss Mary Carpenter, 1868 both of them visited Sir J. B. and Lady Phear, and on their way back visited the Chitpur Hospital. These were bold steps. To the orthodox party in Bengal, a visit to an English family with one's wife

and a Hindu Lady visiting a public institution were revolting acts. This appears from the fact, that in 1868 a political satire was written about this incident in the columns of the *Hindu Patriot*. Mrs. Banerji was the first Hindu Lady to visit a public institution.

In his new home, Banerji commenced in right earnest the work of helping and educating widows. In 1867 he established a Female Circulating Library for the benefit of women of the higher castes. This Library was ultimately amalgamated with the Public Library of Baranagar which Banerji established. He worked most enthusiastically on the Committee appointed by Miss Carpenter in Calcutta for taking proper measures to ensure a permanent supply of female teachers. Unfortunately this Committee did not achieve its end as both Keshava Chunder Sen and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar opposed it tooth and nail, on the ground that the Government was not the proper authority to take up this work. In 1871 Banerji started another girls' school at Kutighata (South Baranagar). In the same year he and his wife set sail for England—his wife being the first Hindu Lady to do so. On their return, Banerji was offered the post of a Deputy Magistrate but he declined it, as its acceptance would have involved the severing of his connection with several philanthropic activities in his native town of Baranagar. In 1873 a School called "Hindu Mohila Vidyalaya" was started at Ballygunge near Calcutta. This was the beginning of the movement for the higher education of grown-up women in the Hindu community. Banerji was the most active member of the Committee of this School. After the retirement of Mr. Justice and Mrs. Phear, the School had to be closed chiefly owing to the opposition of Keshab Chandra Sen; but

its want was supplied by the starting of another institution called "Banga Mahila Vidyalaya" in 1876 at Calcutta by Mr. A. M. Bose and Mr. Durga Mohon Dass. At the time, although Banerji was not at Calcutta, he kept up a constant correspondence with the founders of this new institution. At both of these institutions, the second Mrs. Banerji was educated.

In 1876 the Bengal Branch of the National Indian Association was opened by Sir Richard Temple and Banerji was appointed its corresponding secretary. He was the chief worker of this Branch.

Banerji founded a Bengali Journal called the "Antahpur" for the benefit of Bengali women. It has since been discontinued. Its peculiar feature was that it was written exclusively by ladies. It was edited successively by Banerji's able daughters Ushabala and Banalata, both of whom pre-deceased their father.

Banerji's work for the cause of female education was not confined to Baranagar and to Calcutta. He sympathised with and helped to the best of his power all the workers labouring in this field in the different parts of the country.

Banerji's social services consisted, besides these, in the most active part he took in befriending the cause of the poor Hindu widows, who had to conform against their faith and inclination to the austerities imposed upon them by orthodoxy. But before we enter into a detailed account of Banerji's services in this line, it would be better if I just mention here as to how he came to make the widow's cause his own.

When Banerji was a boy of eight or nine, he witnessed the inhuman torture of a young Hindu widow of his house that had gone astray, by her relatives. The torture resulted in the suicide of the widow. This incident made a keen and lasting impression on the plastic mind of the young boy.

Even to this day whenever he thinks of this incident he shudders with horror. It was this barbarous conduct that stirred Banerji's heart and won him on the side of reform.

"Who knows how many unfortunate widows have suffered the same fate in Hindu homes?" was the thought that kept on hunting his mind. He henceforward resolved to do all he could to improve the condition of Hindu widows. Even when he was fifteen years old, his heart greatly rejoiced when he heard that the Widow Marriage Act was passed into law.

After he had left his ancestral house, he built one for himself at Baranagar. There his cousin sister Bidhumukhi and her widow daughter Kusum Kumari came to live with him. Kusum was married at the early age of five and she became a widow a year after. Both the mother and daughter were educated by Banerji and they came to feel the terrible position of widows in Hindu Society. In 1868 Banerji brought about the re-marriage of Kusum with Babu Chandranath Chaudhri, by their mutual consent and after the death of the first wife of Chandranath. Chandranath was an educated, well-to-do young man of the age of 26; and Kusum was at that time fifteen years old. This was a "pratilom" marriage, as the bride was of Brahmin family and the bridegroom was by caste a Sadgop, a caste corresponding to the ancient Vaisya caste, but lower than the three castes of Brahmin, the Vaidya, and the Kayastha, the three foremost castes in the Bengali Hindu community. The persecution which Banerji had to undergo, while bringing about this marriage, was simply tremendous. On one occasion, after his sister and her daughter had come to live in his new house, his relatives, taking advantage of Banerji's absence from his home for some work in his School forcibly removed the two ladies from their

residence locked them up in a separate room of the family-house, and treated them as prisoners. At this time Banerji had no servant who could give him the information about this. The members of Banerji's orthodox family consulted competent Hindu authorities, and these opined that Chandrayana (shaving of the head), and Prayschitta (atoning ceremony) would not suffice for the sins committed by these ladies of having lived for three nights in a Brahmo's home and of having taken their meals with him. As a punishment they should be banished from the house and made to live for some years in a holy place for the expiation of their sins. They were therefore secretly dispatched to Benares, from which place, after many hardships, Banerji, after an interval of two to three months, brought them back to his own home in Calcutta. He then began work to bring about the re-marriage of his widowed niece. He experienced great difficulties in securing a proper place for the celebration of the marriage. A millionaire offered his house for the purpose; but on the last day he backed out. Banerji was therefore obliged to hire a house for the whole month; and at that place, the marriage was celebrated one week after the date originally announced for the purpose. His sufferings did not yet come to an end. On the day of the marriage, the people of Baranagar gathered round the house and disturbed the proceedings by a shower of stones. Fortunately, with the assistance of the police, serious results were averted. By this boldest act of his life, Banerji offended his whole native town "He was abused by the men, cursed by the women, ridiculed by the frivolous, reviled by the violent, and hated by all." He received anonymous letters containing the foulest abuses and the grossest libels against himself and his family. Letters were sent even to his English friends in

order to lower his influence with them. The Baranagar people tried their best to expel him from the Social Improvement Society which he founded and advanced so well by his able management. Having failed in this move, they removed him from the secretaryship of that Society with the result that the Society suffered considerably. Even the Magistrate and Collector of the Twenty Four Parganas was petitioned to remove Banerji from the Municipal Board of the town of which he was the honorary Secretary; but there too, his enemies did not succeed as the Magistrate knew well the worth and work of Banerji. "The windows of his Baranagar house were broken, the doors were removed, and the whole house presented the woeful appearance of the scene of some violent proceedings." But Banerji was not the man to be cowed down by any amount of persecution. He stood manfully to the guns. Throughout this period of trial, he never neglected his duties towards his church, the local Brahmo Samaj of which he was the founder and minister, and towards the philanthropic activities started by him at Baranagar. He continued to discharge his duties single-minded, and single-handed, with an intensity and purpose so unshakeable that, his enemies saw their mistake at last, and reinstated him in the management of all his institutions. No sooner was this done, than the moribund institutions commenced to revive under his inspiring guidance, and the activities followed their normal course.

Banerji did not rest with the marriage of his widow niece. He continued his zealous work by befriending another widow living in his neighbourhood. Though he was poor he received this widow in his own house; and brought about her remarriage. For this Banerji had to suffer much more than he

did formerly. At this time he was editing a journal in which he was constantly and fearlessly exposing the hypocritical life of many of the Baranagar people who posed before the public as saviours of society. This fearless exposure brought him into trouble. One of the hypocrites prosecuted Banerji for defamation. Banerji was sentenced to suffer imprisonment for three months and to pay a fine of Rs. 500. This was afterwards reduced to fine of Rs. 150, the sentence of imprisonment being set aside in the appeal. Throughout these proceedings, Banerji showed a perfectly gentlemanly conduct. In his Journal, he frankly avowed his fault and published an apology. For this honourable conduct Sir John Phear, one of Banerji's staunchest friends and supporters, paid the whole amount of the fine himself. Banerji not only helped several widows of his native town to re-marry; but he also gave shelter to and arranged the re-marriage of no fewer than thirty-five other widows of respectable families. In fact, ever since the re-marriage of his niece, his home became a refuge for many a helpless and destitute widow "a miniature Widows' Home," so to speak, long before he had made any organized efforts to establish one.

Besides the help thus rendered to particular widows, Banerji, on the death of his first wife, in the year 1877 married a widow himself by way of setting a practical example. He kept up for many years an agitation in the country in favour of the cause of widow-remarriage, through the distribution of pamphlets and leaflets and by means of writing articles in different periodicals. But foremost of all, by his sincere selfless service in this direction, and by his personal example, he was instrumental in firing the enthusiasm of many a young men of his town.

No doubt Banerji was not a Pioneer, but a follower of Keshava Chandra Sen and Ishwara Chandra Vidyasagar, in this line of his activity. From what I have narrated, however one can sufficiently gather that Banerji's services for alleviating the miserable condition of Bengali widows, were really marvellous. As Miss Carpenter said in one of her letters to him, we can say without exaggeration, that Banerji discovered what noble spirits exist in the weaker sex, which in India is crushed and debarred from the exercise of the powers conferred on it by the Almighty Father.

We have till now treated of Banerji's activities in promoting the cause of the widow-remarriage movement. But this is not all. He improved the lot of the Hindu widow in many other directions also. The remarriage of Hindu widows was no doubt the crucial question in regard to the lot of the Hindu widow. But in cases where it was neither possible nor desirable, to press it, some other means of offering relief and lightening the burden had to be found out. Till Banerji took up the larger problem of the education of widows, nobody in Bengal saw his way out of this systematic waste of precious human material. Even the great reformer Keshava Chandra Sen felt himself helpless to do anything in the matter. It is Banerji, therefore who deserves the credit of being a Pioneer in the cause of the education of Hindu widows. I have already pointed out to you how this effort took shape in the year 1864 when Banerji opened a little school in his family house at Baranagar for grown-up widows and other ladies. It had to be soon broken up owing to the religious and social zeal of Banerji. Yet the idea of helping substantially the cause of the education of Hindu widows remained like a living seed in the mind of Banerji, till in the year 1887 it fructified in the

establishment of a Home for Hindu widows. Like a true seer Banerji saw that however unpopular the widow-remarriage cause may be with the people, their compassion and sympathy with the widows could be won over to the cause of their education by any man if he went to work in that direction in a spirit of wisdom, sobriety and right appeal. He therefore struck out an ingenious mode of working out his plan. He decided to conduct his Home on orthodox lines with a view to enlist the sympathy and co-operation of the orthodox leaders of the native community. This move teaches us a lesson and shows clearly why many of the schemes launched by our Indian reformers do not fructify. In connection with this new Widows' Home, Dr. Brojendra Nath Seal, M.A., Ph. D., one of the greatest educationists of the day in Bengal, says that the Hindu community should be grateful to Banerji as to one of its truest and most disinterested benefactors. This Home helped widows, who with the spread of education and better ideas among them could no longer be subjected to the austerities of a widowed life. They wished to be more useful members of society. The Widow's Home offered them a chance of being trained as female teachers, a want long felt in the Hindu Society. In this Home, poor and helpless widows got food, clothing and education, free of charge. Most unfortunately this Home had to be closed owing to Banerji's old age; but not before Banerji and the Government had tried their best to secure a suitable successor to him. No institution or individual was found ready to take up the work. Even the Sadharan Brahmo-samaj was approached. But it declined to run it on orthodox lines. Banerji had trained his cultured daughter Banalata to take up this work. She helped her further so long as she lived; but it was ordained that she should

predecease her father. Banerji was therefore helpless, and was consequently obliged to close, once for all, the doors of his dear institution, simply for want of a capable successor. The Home lacked neither money, nor support; it lacked earnest workers. This reveals the national temper of our people. However that may be, the very founding of such a Home, and the model lines on which it was conducted, did influence the starting of Widows' Homes like Pandtia Ramabai's Sarada Sadan, Karve's Home and others of a similar nature at Mysore and other places. * Even in Bombay, the founders of the Surat Vanita Vishrama have been able to found an Ashrama in Bombay for the benefit of Gujarati Hindu widows. This new Ashrama is to start its work shortly. And the Bombay Presidency Social Reform Association is seriously thinking of starting one in our city. This shows that the beneficent influence of Banerji's work is still living in different parts of our country. I therefore deem it proper to deal in this paper, very briefly with the salient features of the management of Banerji's Widows Home, that it may serve as a guide to the managers of the new Home.

The main features of Banerji's widow's Home are summarized below :—

1. Unlike Hindu homes, the Widows' Home was distinguished for its regularity. Everything had its appointed hour.
2. The boarders were given unsectarian but strongly efficient moral and religious teaching. The important item in such teaching being the very practical character of the discourses that formed part of the Divine Services.

* Broad and extensive has been his sympathy for we find that when Karve's Home was established in Bombay Banerji sent a donation of Rs. 500 which is held there as a permanent fund for the widows.

3. The Home was run on orthodox lines so as to secure for it the active support and co-operation of orthodox leaders. In the home all the orthodox widows were lodged and fed, each according to her own ideas. This practice was so strictly carried out that Pandit Krishnahari Shiromani, one of the oldest leaders of Brahmanism in Bengal and Pandit Shashadhar Tarkachuramani clearly gave out as their opinion that in Banerji's Home, Hindu widows could live, and get education without interference with the practices which the orthodox religion imposed upon them. * Side by side with this there was a separate department, where Hindu guardians, with advanced ideas, could put their wards, and where caste rules were comparatively lax.

4. Discipline was observed in this Home by dividing all its inmates into two main groups, each group being under the charge of a Sisters' Council of five inmates. The Councils entrusted some portion of the household work to each of the inmates and supervised it. An elderly member of each of the two councils kept a Character Book in which the characters of the inmates in their charge were noted. The duties assigned to every inmate became familiar with all the various household duties. In times of illness too, the Councils ordered inmates to nurse the sick and to minister to their wants. Thus all the inmates of the Home learnt regular habits and were trained to realize their responsibility as members of Hindu Society.

5. In the School attached to the Home, the members were given the ordinary education imparted to girls in Girls'

* Rai Radhika Prosanna Mukherji Bahadur, Government Inspector of schools, who belonged to the orthodox society, testified to this fact.

Schools, with the difference that there was no hard and fast distinction between the classes in it, as is seen in an ordinary School. Natural bent and aptitude were consulted and respected far more in it than elsewhere. Thus, a girl in a lower class, showing proficiency in a particular subject, was allowed to attend the higher class. Besides the regular course, lectures were given to the inmates on science, biographies of eminent men and women, sewing, domestic economy, and domestic medicine. The lectures given by Banerji were very interesting and instructive. Cooking and gardening were taught as special subjects to the inmates.* Besides this, the inmates held Weekly Debates on subject of general interest.

6. The Home was really a home in the strict sense of the word, owing to the parental care and affection of Mr. and Mrs. Banerji who were styled by the inmates as their father and mother. All inmates confided to them their complaints, grievances, and difficulties. I will now mention some other miscellaneous activities of Banerji for bringing about the amelioration of Hindu women.

In 1894 Banerji granted a number of stipends to some widows of Baranagar and the neighbouring village who could not join the Home to enable them to hold Classes in their own home for self improvement for imparting knowledge to the members of their sex. They were required to submit monthly reports. Their work was regularly inspected by the lady members of Banerji's family. Even students making satisfactory progress in their lessons or helping others to learn were granted small stipends to encourage them in their labours. Thus in and about Baranagar 14 Home Class Centres of

* Before this cooking was not taught in girl's Schools.

Instruction were started in the course of two years. These Banerji supported from his own funds. Ultimately he had to give them up for want of financial support.

Banerji also awarded small monthly stipends to the wives of poor school Pandits and teachers to encourage them to learn with a view to help their husbands in their teaching work. In his home, he similarly offered stipends to women deserted by their husbands who were lost to all sense of responsibility and conscience, and to wives of Kulin Brahmins, for being trained up as teachers. Banerji also trained widows as Sisters of the Poor and formed them into groups to do useful services to the people.

We have seen the wonderful influence that Banerji wielded on the female sex by his saintly sincerity. He influenced his wife, his sister-in-law and other members of his own family to learn. He rightly educated his daughters. His youngest daughter Indubala, had she lived, would have been a model Hindu woman. He brought about so many widow re-marriages. His hold on the inmates of his Widows' Home was extraordinary. He was a staunch friend of Miss Mary Carpenter and Miss Manning, the successive secretaries of the National Indian Association. Banerji, when he left his ancestral home, lived for some months in the house of a Brahmo friend, Babu Chandranath Chaudhri, the future husband of Kusum Kumari. Chandranath, after he became a Brahmo, found it difficult to manage his wife who was instigated by his female relatives to harass him. Thinking of the great influence wielded by both Mr. and Mrs. Banerji on the people, he requested them to come and stay with him so that his wife may be persuaded to come over to his side. Thus it came about that both Banerji and his wife went to live

with Chandranath. There they behaved towards the wife of Chandranath so well, that she gradually came round to the side of her husband, and within a short time, joined the Brahmo worship; and when Banerji and his wife were about to depart, she was thoroughly converted into a real comrade of her husband. This incident shows how much Banerji and his cultured wife were able to do for the emancipation of women by their personal work.

I may mention here, that both the first and the second wife of Banerji proved most serviceable to him in bringing all Banerji's activities to a successful issue. This shows how when women are educated, they accelerate the progress of society.

Banerji was a Pioneer in the work of emancipating the woman hood of Bengal. Till he commenced his social activities for the benefit of the women of his own household, female education was mostly confined to girls of a very tender age. It ignored entirely the very large class of young married girls and widows of tender years. He was the first to recognise the needs of this large class and braved all difficulties and successfully overcame them by his earnest enthusiasm, dogged persistence, and exemplary devotion to duty. It was Banerji who broke through the many superstitious practices of the orthodox Hindus. *viz.*, Parda system, objection to foreign travel, etc., etc. He openly avowed his social and religious convictions. In all these manifold activities, Banerji was successful because he had faith in God. He was never put out by difficulties; he had the courage of his convictions; he had the active sympathy and support of a few sympathetic and kind-hearted European ladies and gentlemen and also of a very few relatives. Besides these, he worked from within out.

wards. He first improved his own wife, then his family, then the females of his own town. His circle of activities widened from the improvement of his home as the centre of it. Thus he alone could inspire confidence and win admiration and gather staunch supporters to his cause.

We have only to contrast the times when Banerji worked—times of blind superstition, when educating one's wife and other female relatives was a sin and a shame; when the rewards of it all were ridicule and persecution—with the present times in Bengal, when it is full of girls' Schools, Zenana Classes, several of them conducted by female teachers and Professors, of whom a considerable number are graduates and under-graduates of the different Indian Universities to appreciate the **pioneer work** of Banerji in the field of female education. And this appreciation is changed into admiration when we recollect that Banerji achieved it all in the midst of the hard work he had to do to meet his personal wants. His life was one continuous round of duties well performed, life of toil, suffering, persecution and hardship, lived in the midst of the distracting work of earning his own livelihood.

3—TEMPERANCE WORK.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, drunkenness in Bengal was more prevalent and obtrusive than it is to-day. To cure this evil, several prominent Indians and Englishmen like Keshava Chandra Sen, Pyari Charan Sarkar, Rev. Dall, Rev. Paine and others worked very zealously. Banerji too joined this noble band of workers. Perceiving the bad effects caused by drink on his native town he established on the 27th

March 1864, a Temperance Society at Baranagar. This was one of the oldest temperance organizations of India. After a short time Banerji was appointed its Honorary Secretary and as such, he took very keen interest in its welfare. But like other workers in the field of temperance reform, he did not rest content with mere preaching and writing. He deemed it essential that in this kind of work as in others, personal work—work by persons on persons was essential, if the work had to produce tangible results. Banerji was eminently suited by his nature and personal habits to do this kind of work. He was himself a total abstainer and has remained so to this day, in spite of all temptations he met in his life to break his temperance pledge. He does not take any intoxicating drug. Once when he was advised medically to take opium, he declined to do so by saying “No, Doctor, I cannot die an opium eater.” He was in the habit of smoking “hukka”; but gave it up at the age of 25 when he was taunted by a friend of the patient whom he had visited. He refrains also from providing wine to those who are in the habit of drinking it. He declined to lease the date trees of his orchard as he knew full well that the trees would be used for the manufacture of toddy. Thus fortified by his pure habits, he did personal work among the people addicted to drink. He visited individual drunkards both in their own homes and in their drinking clubs when the same were in full swing. There he held friendly conversations with them such as would reclaim them from their vicious habits. He delivered sermons to the people addicted to the drink habit. He caused essays to be written on the evils of drink, and rewarded the successful competitors with suitable prizes. During the first year of the existence of this Society, Banerji succeeded in rescuing upwards of twenty young men

from intemperance and vice by his rare influence. These rescued persons in their turn commenced to help Banerji in several of his philanthropic activities. He used his influence in breaking up a Drinking Club and converted it into a Reading Club. This was joined by several persons rescued by Banerji. At all the meetings of the Society, Banerji offered prayers before the commencement of its work. Meetings of this Society were frequently disturbed by drunkards and wine-sellers. Banerji too was personally attacked from all sides. Taunts and abuses were the rewards he earned from those whom he wanted to improve. Attempts were made to sully his reputation by libellous reports. His enemies tried to put him to all sorts of trouble, but they failed most ignominiously. Once Banerji objected to return home in a boat hired by him and others, because he saw therein a basket full of wine bottles. This resulted in Banerji's being forced to spend one night under Police surveillance. He was charged by the wine merchant for the abduction of his man; but next day, the man being produced, the case was dismissed and he and his colleagues were released. I give this incident to show Banerji's high sense of duty, and also to show how much he was harassed. Banerji was not a man of the stuff of which cowards are made. He went on doing his humanitarian work with great vigour. He organized a "Band of Hope"—a union of boys pledged to temperance principles; and assisted that body with his usual energetic work. He established, in connection with the Temperance Society, a Temperance Library, the expenses of which were mostly borne by him, and circulated books and pamphlets therefrom among those likely to benefit by their perusal. Banerji delivered lectures on Temperance in the Night school established by himself. In 1870

this Temperance Society changed into a Working Men's Club. When Banerji went to England he was warmly welcomed at all the towns he visited. There too, he gave temperance lectures and received addresses showing Englishmen's sympathy towards such work. There he joined the Good Templars body and was initiated as a member of the Order at the Day Star Lodge, Bristol, on 14th July 1871. At Baranagar he has reclaimed hundreds from the paths of intemperance and vice.

4—MISCELLANEOUS SOCIAL SERVICE.

MUNICIPAL SANITARY REFORMS.—In 1864 his first child died in consequence of the bad sanitary condition of the lying-in-rooms of those times. After experiencing some difficulty, Banerji effected a salutary reform in this line, and he was followed by many others in his province. In 1869 he was appointed an Honorary Secretary of the Municipal Board of Barahnagar. As such, he worked hard to bring about many salutary reforms. He helped in the construction of roads where there were none, in improving those which were impassable, in constructing culverts and in providing for the drainage of the town. He was thus the foremost reformer in bringing about Municipal improvements which improved the condition of Baranagar and the adjoining places.

RELIEF WORK.—In 1866 when there was a terrible Famine Banerji helped many widows. In one instance, just as he and his wife were about to sit down to dinner, there came a famished woman at the door with a starving child at her breast. He deprived himself and his wife of their food and gave it to the woman. This instance I give particularly to show how Banerji's heart overflowed with the milk of human

kindness. In 1867 when a terrible cyclone created havoc in Bengal, Banerji, with his noble band of workers, came forward to help the needy, sought relief from Government and distributed charity at the doors of the suffering poor. In 1870, when cholera raged in Bengal, he gave free medicine and diet. In 1872 he established the North Suburban Association for charitable relief to the able-bodied but destitute, to the helpless sick, to widows and orphans, to the aid of burning or burying dead bodies and in finding out other worthy objects of charity. This Association did much practical good. In 1893 he established the Atmiya Sava, and through it got many poor Brahmo boys admitted free into Keshub Academy.

SOCIAL SERVICE IN HIS HOME AND IN EDUCATIONAL MATTERS.—In 1866 Banerji established a Vernacular School for boys at Baranagar. In 1872 he opened an Exhibition there, mainly for the education of the local population. He rendered valuable services as a member of the Committee of Public Education. After his return from England, he opened an Infant school on the Kindergarten principle. He gave his sons the highest University education, Believing. University education to the unsuitable, especially in the case of girls, he carefully taught his daughters to become good house-wives, gave them a general knowledge of the English language to enable them to read easy books on useful subjects and a special knowledge of their mother-tongue to enable them to mould it well, both for speaking and writing. He encouraged literary efforts in his daughters. Banerji made these efforts for the education of his sons and daughters that they may devote their energy to the service of their mother-land, according to the powers God had given them, and the education.

they had received. Besides these efforts to educate his children, he took special care to mould their lives on noble patterns. Vulgarity, anger, chastisement, luxury, and finery were unknown in his home. On the contrary, there reigned sweetness, pleasantness, frugality, simplicity, and comfort. His home atmosphere is pervaded by the spirit of a living faith. All, including menials, are addressed in a respectable way. He gave rewards to his children for special acts of merit. Every child was given pocket-mony and was taught how to spend it worthily. Even the proper use of money received rewards in kind. Thus, side by side with his social service for outsiders, he did social service for his own home as well. Many reformers neglect their homes ; and thus when their children turn out to be bad men and women, they become themselves the laughing stock of the people at large. Banerji carried reform on natural lines by putting into practice the adage "Charity begins at home."

RELIGIOUS REFORM.

The religious activities of Banerji are more important than those in the social fields, as the successful work in the latter depends entirely on the faith that inspires those who work in it. And the sincerity or otherwise of that faith depends upon the living flame of a true and catholic religion that goes to feed it. Moreover, while dealing with the life and career of a particular individuality, it is essential to deal with the man from all sides of his life ; otherwise the portrait painted by us in words fails to show the real man. It is only for the sake of convenience that we classify separately all the services tendered to society by a particular individual. While we do so, our eye must be fixed on that aspect of his life which constitutes the inner

spring of his actions. Life is more than our material existence and the continuance of its vital processes. Life means all that makes a man distinctive. A man enters into life when he enters into relationship with God. To have mere physical, or intellectual, or emotional development is not life ; but to be spiritually minded is life. Intellect there is little that is truly dynamic. True morality comes by the vitalising of the spirit. We should always remember that man is a unity, it being made up of physical, intellectual and spiritual elements. All these parts of his being are inter-related. The contemplative and practical, the inner and outer, are connected by subtle bonds, and no one side can be neglected without the whole life suffering from such a neglect. True religion has always an eye to the practical. "The still hour is for the stormy hours ; communion is for life : prayer is for work." The devotional life finds its meaning and purpose in active service.

In the case of Banerji's life, you will see clearly that his religious life translated itself into human service ; and that his social service was ennobled and inspired by all the accredited means of spiritual culture, *viz*, prayer, solitude, meditation, devotional reading, etc. As for Banerji, one can safely say without any fear of contradiction, that he lived his life "with continual reference to God, with thoughts, affections, hopes, desires, circling towards Him, as a bird hovers to its nest."

The only successful social servants are those who get their inspiration from their spiritual belief. When we look to the lives of great reformers, we find that the main spring of their successful careers lay in their personal religion. It is only people of this stamp, those who co-operate with God in His design, that are able to withstand successfully opposition,

ridicule, and ingratitude, and to achieve their goal, To this Banerji was no exception. His life too was a God-inspired life. It was "true to the kindred poles of heaven and Earth"

It is wrong to think that the mere wish to do good would serve as a sufficient motive power in the lives of social servants. Such wish vanishes into thin air when persecution is severe and acute, Banerji defined religion to be taking in and drawing out, *i.e.*, loving others, both God and man, and making others love, Thus Banerji's personal religion was very catholic embracing within its wide compass, persons of all shades of religious views. Banerji's house was thronged by people of all religious denominations. He himself took part in the religious services of all kinds and sorts of people. We have seen how he joined the *Sankirtans* of the working classes. He had a wonderfully tolerant mind. It appears that his liberal faith owes its origin very likely to his belief that truth is universal, however it may be conceived in different forms suited to different countries. The common element of all religion is a changing, ever increasing thing, and therefore it is discerned more and more clearly as the devotees advance in their spiritual perception. Banerji was brought up in an orthodox family who firmly believed in polytheism. Yet on his twentieth birth-day, he gave clear evidence of the liberal cast of his mind, when he made the family Guru change the usual mantra into a theistic one of *Anando Brahmeti* from the *Bhrigu Valli* of the Taittiriya Upanishad. Once, on hearing a stirring religious discourse of Keshava Chandra Sen, he made up his mind to openly join the Brahmo faith. He gave up caste, idolatry and the sacred thread. All these were the marks of orthodoxy and their open discarding by Banerji kindled the

wrath, not only of the members of his own family, but of the whole town of Baranagar. He was persecuted to death. This indignation grew into intense hatred by Banerji's religious zeal in bringing about the re-marriage of his widowed niece Kusum Kumari. Yet he never budged an inch from his own principles. He steadfastly carried out his duties in a religious spirit, until at last opposition itself died out. He reigned supreme as formerly in the hearts of his countrymen. Banerji always called himself a reformed Hindu. In his various philanthropic activities he always adhered to his religious convictions; but they being very liberal, he always utilized the forces of orthodoxy to minister to the needs of the public. His Widows' Home at Barahnagar was conducted by him on orthodox lines, and hence it was a success. When Banerji's failing health forced him to give up his work, the Sadharana Brahmo Samaj did not take up the work as it entailed conducting the Home on orthodox lines. Banerji's liberal Hinduism had several peculiar features. It was distinctively practical. He attached great importance to prayer. Prayer has been his strength and refuge throughout his life, public and private. It is combined with real intense faith. Thus, with this happy combination of his forceful prayers and deep faith, all his difficulties vanished away. Banerji goes further than this. He believes that diseases could be cured by the combined influence of prayer and faith. It is said that on many occasions, he effected wonderful cures by this means alone. Sitanath Tettwabhushan, Banerji's good friend, writing about this matter, testified thus:—"I must confess that to me Mr. Banerji's faith in such cure seem to belong to a pre-scientific state, but I must give him the credit of being thoroughly sincere, and also admit that the ins-

stances referred to are really marvellous and inexplicable by the known laws of nature.

Throughout the last fifty years, Banerji has invariably kept up his practice of constant self-examination and morning family devotions, accompanied by fervent singing and discourses. It is important to note here, that Banerji's discourses were very effective. They were "interspersed with simple anecdotes and homely metaphors and based on close observation of the daily lives of the inmates of his family, but calculated to touch their defects without causing any bitterness of feeling." This resulted in all that was noble and good in the lives of the members of his family. His prayers are short and simple, but full of the evidence of the richness of the treasures of this humble heart. His religious attitude has made him wonderfully humble. To give only one instance of this trait of this character. Once he had said some hard words to his debtor, who put him off from time to time. Then, when he was in his church, about to commence his Divine Service, he remembered about this ; he left the pulpit, went to the debtor's house, but not finding him at home, he knelt down in the debtor's room, prayed fervently and confessed his sin. It was after this that he returned to his church and conducted the Service. Banerji always likes to have his friends point out to him his defects so that he may learn to improve. He knows not the policy of retaliation. When he was asked by his friends to prosecute the accuser who had charged him for abduction, he refused to do so. Even when he was advised to prosecute his relations for trespass and illegal confinement, at the time that his orthodox relations forcibly removed his cousin and her widow daughter from his new house taking all circumstances into consideration he declined to take steps

relying on God alone to bring about a happy result. And the happy result came in future. Banerji has a wonderful faith in an ever-active Providence. This faith is more than abundantly justified in the career of his life. His personal religion made him a unique lover of peace. He tried his best to bring about a settlement of religious disputes. He was a prominent member of the Arbitration Committee appointed at Calcutta. He established the Sadharan Dharma Sabha in 1873, which aimed at the "union and mutual co-operation of the various religious bodies of the country without, at the same time, any surrender of their peculiar doctrines and practices." This liberal movement was not approved of by many of his Brahmo friends. In the course of a few years, his Sabha failed for want of active workers to keep it going in the absence of Banerji. However it served a useful purpose in radiating its influence of cheerful and liberal thoughts among those that joined it.

In 1873, in a place popularly called "Sasi Babu's Hall" built mainly at Banerji's expense and partly by subscriptions gathered mostly from friends in England, Banerji founded the Sasipada Institute, for "the diffusion of useful knowledge and doing other good and charitable work in and around Baranagar." To this Institute, he has given away his own private Library and Museum. He also presented funds for the maintenance and improvement of the Sadharan Dharma Sabha. In this Institute, a variety of philanthropic work is carried on. During the day, it is used as the school-room for the female Boarding School and was used as a class-room for the Widow's Home when the same was in existence. In the evening, classes are held there for instructing working men and boys. The Institute has a Reading Room attached to it.

In this room, a good number of English and Bengali periodicals are kept on the table. Meetings are also held there to promote objects of local interest and to advance the cause of religion and morals. All these associations carrying on their activities in the Institute were endowed by Banerji with what little he possessed, he not being a rich man. I have purposely mentioned in detail all the work carried out in the building called "Sasi Babu's Hall" to point out to our civic fathers the necessity of widely utilising the public buildings they have in their charge for a similar purpose. In this connection, it would be quite appropriate to mention here that in America the public school-house is used as the common centre for the civic, social, recreational and educational life of the community. It is truly said in one of the American reports that "In the public school plant there is a whole atmosphere of value unrealized, undiscovered by those who think of it as simply a place for the education of children." In this way, public libraries, gardens and many other buildings could be widely utilized for the civic welfare of the people. This wider use of public buildings is a modern view of new philanthropy, and when we find Banerji putting into practice this idea so many years ago, in our backward country, we have every reason to be proud of this great philanthropist.

The last work of Banerji for the service of humanity is the Devalaya. It was founded on the 1st of January 1908 at Calcutta. It is but the resuscitation of his old Sadharan Dharma Sabha in a modern garb and on a permanent footing. Devalaya, we quote from the Trust Deed, is an Association "for devotional exercises, and for literary, scientific, philanthropic and charitable works. It aims at the promotion of religious devotion and the establishment of unity, brotherly

feeling, and mutual co-operation among the various communities of the country without any surrender of their respective peculiar doctrines and practices." The founder of this Devalaya—Banerji—has made over to the public his own dwelling house in Cornwallis Street, Calcutta, by a Trust Deed. There are more than 1200 members of Devalaya, and they belong to different communities and different faiths. Hindus, Muslmans, Christians, Brahmo, Arya Samajists, Buddhists, Theosophists and others are all included on the roll of this new universal church. In this House of God, every day the faithful of various creeds meet for worship. On every Sunday, in the Devalaya, there are gatherings for children.

Dr. Sir Rabindra Nath Tagore speaks of the Devalaya in the following appreciative terms : "When a seed germinates, it rends the earth, but when it develops into a full-grown tree with its branches and twigs, it gives shade to the earth. Time was when the Brahmo Samaj raised its head in and through opposition. The establishment of the Devalaya is a proof positive of the fact that the day of struggle and opposition for the Brahmo Samaj is drawing to its close. It is my belief that they alone have rightly understood the mission of the Brahmo Samaj who are attempting to provide in the shade of this huge tree a common meeting ground for all."

It is necessary to point out here that from the time of Akbar down to our modern times, various attempts have been made to bring about the union of persons of various religious denominations on a common platform. But in all these former movements, the assembled representatives of the different faiths spoke only of such things as were held in common by all. Even in such meetings, unguarded reference to one's peculiar doctrines was not liked, and was often resented,

Banerji's Devalaya improved upon this practice. Banerji truly felt that when persons of various faiths met under a common roof, the spiritual atmosphere of the House of God should not be too close; but it should be such that the persons assembled, should with all their idiosyncrasies of belief and manner be encouraged to fraternize with each other in such a way as to make each individual have a respect for and toleration of a brother's peculiarities. The only restriction imposed on persons attending the Devalaya is that in the services, addresses, and sermons delivered there, by persons of different religions, and even in the conversations conducted there by them, they were not "to vilify, mock or ridicule any religion, religious doctrine, religious sect, or any community or individual, or use any contemptuous or insulting words with reference to any one." Here too, we see Banerji as a Pioneer.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

I have called Banerji a great Social Servant advisedly. Among the biographies of eminent Indians known to the present generation, I do not know of any one who could be said to have put in so much good for his fellow-brethren in a continuous selfless way for upward of half a century, excepting the eminent services of the grand Old Man of India—Dadabhai Naoroji. The latter commenced his social activities splendidly; but kind Providence had decreed that Dadabhai should serve his country superabundantly only in the limited circle of the political field; but his unique services, for obvious reasons, could not be styled supremely important in the case of our country which is so low in the scale of nations on account of its social slavery. It is said truly that the laws, Government, etc. of a country are such as the people deserve

to have them. Till we deserve the highly coveted boon of thorough political emancipation, it will not come. The foundations should be strongly laid in the moral and religious emancipation of India's millions. Hence the fifty years' service of Mr. Banerji in the field of social and religious reform in which there is no other Indian to compare with him, may justly be styled great service taking into consideration the purest motives that inspired it. We are justified in worshipping the doer of them as a really great and good man.

We find in Banerji all the nine ingredients of the spectrum of love, as enumerated by Henry Drummond, *viz.* : patience kindness ; generosity ; humility ; courtesy, unselfishness ; good temper ; guilelessness ; sincerity. These according to Drummond, enable us to measure the stature of the perfect man ; and we are happy to find these good qualities so harmoniously blended in the hero of our sketch.

To give the independent testimony of Sir Stuart Bayley, formerly Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, one who knew Banerji well, would suffice to convince my hearers about the truth of my emphatic assertion : "Mr. Sasipada Banerji, who, I am proud to say, is a friend of mine, is a man of thoughtful disposition, exceedingly kind and exceedingly useful, going about his work in a quiet, unassuming way, and doing a great amount of good. He is a man for whom I have the greatest admiration and respect "

"Mr. Sasipada Banerji is one of the most remarkable men I have met and for whom I have long felt the highest regard and respect. The qualities which struck me in my personal intercourse with him were an unusual combination. The meditative introspection, the metaphysical receptiveness of the best Eastern mood, combined with the moral energy and

organizing capacity of the West; a consuming passion for the welfare of his people and all embracing tolerance of creed, founded not on carelessness but on comprehensiveness."

In almost all his beneficent activities, Banerji has been a true pioneer. Himself being a high-caste Kulin Brahmin, brought up in orthodox ways, having been deprived of the guidance of his father at a very early age, not having received sufficient English education, struggling for a long time for his own livelihood, unaided by State and working single-handedly to carry out successively so many good movements for the good of his countrymen and countrywomen, at a time when the effects of Western civilization having intoxicated the people were not as they ought to have been, in spite of vehement persecution both from his own people and from the residents of his native town of Baranagar, and above all, in spite of his not being supported in some of his activities even by his liberal Brahmo friends our admiration for our hero rises to the point of worship.

So far as his work for the emancipation of females was concerned, we have seen that unlike other reformers he commenced reforming his own home, and thereupon secured true coadjutors and real helpmates. Till he commenced his work of female education nobody had ever paid any serious attention, so far as Bengal is concerned, to the question of educating married women and widows. Even in the case of widows, the ways in which Banerji conducted his Home were quite novel. Never before his time was such a Home started. It paved the way directly or indirectly for the several Homes in different parts of India. The relationship he had established between himself and the inmates of the Home were such that whenever

Banerji had to leave for a tour and when he gathered the inmates of the Home to bid them farewell, a wail of lamentation arose from them and nothing could restore them to perfect rest but his return. He was the first person to take his wife to England. He with the valuable assistance of his wife, educated widows, made them feel their miserable position in Hindu society and helped them to emancipate themselves. He brought about the re-marriages of suitable widows. He brought up his family in such an ideal way that when his second wife entered his home, she received warm welcome from his four elderly sons, and the relationship that existed between the step-mother and her children was so ideal that no visitor to their house was able to find out that they were not the mother and children. The atmosphere of his home was so angelic that the venerable Pandit Krishnahari Siromani of Bhatpara, Banerji's family Guru, remarked that it looked like the Ashramas of the Rishies he had read of in ancient books. Banerji brought about several reforms in the marriage institution of the Hindu Society. In his own case he gave up the evil customs of child marriage and early marriage, and married at the age of 20 (a suitable age for those times) a girl of his choice. He brought about reforms by way of inter-caste marriages, and inter-provincial marriages. His work for the working classes was taken up so seriously and carried out so vigorously; and that too, long before the question of the Depressed Classes got its foothold or was even thought about on Indian soil. Even his broadminded, broad-based religious ideal of catholicity was long before that ideal was realized in the civilized world of the United States of America in the Chicago Parliament of Religions. "The Devalaya is the highest and noblest fruit of the tree of his life and stands for the

House of God, love, knowledge, unity, peace, self-sacrifice and devotion."

Thus, judging these activities from the standpoint of the times in which they were carried out, single-handedly and that too when they were not even thought of by others, one really admires the inward spirit that prompted this great soul. Banerji has rightly been styled by Satintranath Ray Choudhuri, the Honorary Secretary of the Devalaya as "The Apostle of Improvement." Sitanath Tattvabhushan has truly called Banerji the last great Bengal Reformer in as much as after him no great reformer has been born in Bengal ; all who have arisen have followed Banerji and his noble contemporaries, Keshava Chandra Sen, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and a few others, Banerji fully realized the inwardness of the reform movements needed for India. He saw with the vision of a prophet that India's salvation will come only through the union of the various castes and classes, through the elevation of the backward depressed classes, and through the emancipation of its ignorant, down-trodden, dumb millions of women who not only remain passive, but who by their ways, born of total ignorance, clog the wheels of national progress. He recognized the supreme importance of the voice of conscience in the soul of man. By his life, he falsified the wrong notions of luke-warm, milk-water type of reformers who screen themselves under the plausible argument that to be effective reformers, we need not alienate ourselves from our communities by acting against established custom. Banerji for his reformed views, was already put out of caste, was deprived of the right of eating with them, and his caste people stopped smoking 'hukkas' on the same seat with him. Even common amenities of neighbourly life were denied to him. But he did not mind these

things and answered publicly by his own noble example that if, following the voice of conscience, if faithfulness to our sense of truth and right, does alienate us from society, that society deserves to be abandoned. To those reformers, who argue about the precedence to be given either to social or political reform, he by his faithful adherence to social and religious activities, exemplified that we should deserve before we desire political emancipation by repenting of iniquities practised and perpetuated by us towards our wives, daughters, sisters, and men who are really our own, but whom we have long treated as aliens. He set as naught completely the laissez-faire theory of social reform well-styled as reform "along the lines of least resistance" and treated it "not only a cowardly shrinking from unpopularity, but also as a miscalculation of the latent powers of society to recover its health when the knife is rigorously applied to the removal of its festering sores." He saw like a prophet that Indian's voice will be truly and respectably heard only, when we gird up our loins right earnestly to raise the backward and depressed classes "by mixing with them as brethren, by smiling with their smiles and weeping with their tears, and lending a helping hand to all their efforts to better their condition" and not by condescending to act towards them as superiors, doling out to them crumbs from a distance. It is said truly by S. D. Gordon that "There are always the three turnings of a true life, upward, inward, outward. Upward to God, the keener is the longing to get off with Himself alone, the deeper is the yearning to be pure, and the stronger is the passion to help others, regardless of any sacrifice involved. Please mark well that there are three lives here ; three in one, the secret life of prayer, the open life of purity, the active life of service. Not one, not the other, not

any two, but all three, this is the true ideal. This is the true rounded life. And note also that this gives the true perspective of service. The service life grows up out of the other two. Its roots lie deep down in prayer and purity. This explains why so much service is fruitless. It isn't rooted. "There is no rich subsoil." In the case of Banerji, his life was a truly rounded life, as all the three elements of purity, prayer and service were wonderfully combined in him. He was a genuine social worker in as much as he worked voluntarily, conscientiously, intelligently according to his light, and persistently according to his strength, both on his individual account and as a part of various organized movements, for the promotion of common welfare and according to the spirit of the motto of his Devalaya : "God is One and Humanity One." He succeeded so eminently in his social services because he had a deep knowledge of human nature. He had patient perseverance, tact, originality, forethought, moral activity, and self-restraint. Banerji was frugal, simple, thoughtful, careful, open-minded, and impartial. He stuck to his work in spite of disappointments. He ignored unreasoning complaints. He quietly answered misrepresentations; and was never disheartened by ingratitude. We cannot better sum up Banerji's life than by saying that "he fed the hungry, gave shelter to the homeless, knowledge to the ignorant, and medicine to the sick. He was always a friend to the needy."

I wish with all earnestness that some capable literary Indian should collect all the necessary materials for writing a good biography of this eminent Indian Social Servant, in as much as his life furnishes quite rich materials for an instructive and inspiring biography. If the leaders of modern India desire their young countrymen to emulate the noble examples of

Dadabhy Naoroji, Ranade, Gokhale, Sasipada Banerji and other eminent personages, they cannot do better than to see that good biographies of India's great sons are written by capable hands. It is want of these that fails to mould the plastic minds of India's rising generation into ideal patterns. I will feel amply rewarded for the labour devoted to the preparation of this paper, if some of my young friends are inspired by hearing my presentation of Banerji to sacrifice their lives as modern Sanyasis for the service of their Mother-land, as members of The Servants of India Society do, or are inspired to start Social Service Leagues in their towns or villages and to take active, keen interest in their work and welfare. Even if this higher sacrifice is not possible for all, may I ask my hearers whether it is too much to expect from the admirers of Sasipada Banerji to see that they devote at least some portion of their time for the service of their country, The destiny of all countries lies in the hands of its young men. In India there are vast opportunities for social service; what India lacks is social Servants. To find in a country of 33 crores of souls, only a few servants of India, does not speak well for our boasted patriotism. I have now done. Applying the ever memorable words of Chalmers, we can say for Banerji, "that he has lived for something. He has done good, and left for his countrymen and women a monument of virtue that the storms of time can never destroy. He has written his name in kindness, love and mercy, on the hearts of the thousands he came in contact with year by year, and he will not be forgotten."

Let us all with one voice say to this veteran leader, "Dear Banerji, your name, your deeds will be as legible on the hearts you leave behind as the stars on the brow of evening,

and will shine as brightly on earth as the stars of heaven." Let us all fervently pray to the God of all love, truth, purity and justice to keep this venerable patriarch, saintly brother, long amidst us, hale and hearty to inspire us with his becon light and to kindle the fire of emulation in the hearts of many of his young countrymen to follow his worthy example.

If we are true patriots, and sincerely admire the life-work of India's true sons let us all put into practice the sincere advice our lately departed great patriot The Hon. Gopal Krishna Gokhale gave to India's young men in his Presidential Address delivered at the 14th Annual Meeting of the Students' Brotherhood of Bombay on 9th October 1911 when he said :—

"The attainment of a democratic form of self-government such as obtains in the other parts of the Empire must depend upon the average strength and character and capacity of our people taken as a whole, for it is on our average strength that the weight of the edifice of self-government will have to rest. And here it must be regretfully admitted that our average to-day is far below the English average. Therefore the most important work before us, is to endeavour to raise this average so that it may approach the English average, as the French and the Dutch averages do. Here is work enough for the most enthusiastic lover of his country. In fact on every side, whichever way we turn, only one sight meets the the eye, that of work to be done ; and only one cry is heard, that there are but few faithful workers. The elevation of the depressed classes who have to be brought up to the level of the rest of our people, universal elementary education, co-operation, improvement of the economic condition of the peasantry, higher education of women, spread of industrial and

technical education and building up the industrial strength of the country, promotion of closer relations between the different communities, these are some of the tasks which lie in front of us and each needs a whole army of devoted missionaries. Shall the need go unsupplied? Out of the thousands of young men that leaves our Universities year after year shall not even a few hear within them the voices that speak to the spirit and respond gladly to this call? The work is the work of our country. It is also the work of humanity. If after all the awakening of which we speak and over which justly rejoice these fields do not yield their harvest for want of workers, India must wait for another generation before she receives faithful service from her children."

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